

# POV

Community  
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

## American Promise

A Film by  
Michèle Stephenson and Joe Brewster



[www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

BROOKLYN, 2013

Twelve years ago, as a husband and wife filmmaking team, we took the great risk of turning the camera on ourselves and on our son, Idris, and his best friend, Seun, who were beginning kindergarten at the prestigious Dalton School in New York City. We had great expectations for the boys and were eager to document their journey through school. We were confident that this incredible opportunity would set them on a course for academic success and we wanted to capture it all on film. However, our high expectations fell short as the boys struggled with stereotype and identity, and as parents we and Seun's parents wrestled with doubts and angst over our sons' futures. This personal experience pushed us to expose the impact of the unique social and emotional needs of black boys on their academic performance.



Filmmakers Michèle Stephenson and Joe Brewster.

Photo courtesy of Orrie King

**American Promise** is the product of our 13-year film shoot. Through our own personal struggles and the children's triumphs and setbacks, the documentary reveals complicated truths about parenting, puts a face on the unique issues with which African-American boys must deal and challenges commonly held assumptions about educational access in the 21st century. All American families want to give their children the opportunity to succeed. But the truth is, opportunity is just the first step—particularly for families raising black boys.

Our aim for **American Promise** is to galvanize a national conversation about what it takes for parents, educators and the community to help further the academic success and bolster the socio-emotional health of our African-American boys and to promote individual behavior change. We hope that you will join us on this journey toward making sure all children have the opportunity to fulfill the **American Promise**.

### Michèle Stephenson and Joe Brewster

Filmmakers, **American Promise**

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Idris and Seun.

Photo courtesy of Michèle Stephenson

Nurturing boys as they grow into men is hard for any family today; the challenges range from daily struggles like completing homework and negotiating online access, to bigger issues like the search for identity and the need to make responsible choices in an often confusing world. When the boys are black, the childrearing also inevitably involves lessons about racism, authority, authenticity and safety.

**American Promise** embraces and explores these childrearing challenges, especially as they apply to middle-class families. It follows two best friends, Idris and Seun, from kindergarten to high school graduation. Filmed by Idris's parents, the documentary provides an intimate and provocative account of two black boys who come of age against the backdrop of Barack Obama's presidency and tragedies like the Trayvon Martin shooting.

Central to the film is the boys' acceptance into Manhattan's prestigious Dalton School. In 1999, this private—and historically white—school admitted Seun and Idris as part of efforts

to diversify its student body. The school was academically first-rate, but its opportunities were mostly devoid of anything reflecting the boys' cultural identities. The families grappled with their choice and whether or not sending their sons to Dalton was the best way to prepare them for lifelong success as black men.

The film invites viewers to join in a public conversation about how young men negotiate being black while also preparing to succeed in a world where white people control a disproportionate amount of economic and political power. As an outreach tool, it shares insights about Idris's and Seun's complicated journeys to American manhood, while exploring parenting issues and education policy. It raises questions about the interweaving of race, class and opportunity as it asks audiences to consider the meaning of the **American Promise** for these boys and for each of us.

**American Promise** is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to education, growing up African-American and parenting, including *Off and Running*, *The Principal Story* and *The Boys of Baraka*, as well as films in the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's American Graduate initiative**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section**
- **Policy makers, including education officials**
- **High school students, youth groups and diversity clubs**
- **Social service agencies and other organizations focused on families and parenting**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Civic, fraternal and community groups**
- **Academic departments (especially schools of education) and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries**
- **Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions, and museums**
- **Organizations dedicated to the wellbeing of African-Americans**
- **Parenting groups**

**American Promise** is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

**Academic achievement**

**Achievement gap**

**Adolescence**

**African-Americans**

**Assimilation**

**Concepts of manhood**

**Diversity**

**Education**

**Educational equity**

**Gender identity**

**Identity development**

**Implicit bias**

**Internalized racism**

**Learning disabilities**

**Multicultural education**

**Parenting of boys**

**Parental engagement**

**Psychology**

**Racial disparity**

**Racial identity**

**Racism**

**Raising boys**

**Socioeconomic class**

**Stereotype threat**

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **American Promise** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach)

### A Note about Facilitation

American Promise raises issues that may provoke difficult conversations. Some people may deflect their own discomfort with those issues by focusing on judging the filmmakers' parenting skills or the boys' behavior. To avoid getting bogged down in unproductive personal attacks, you might remind participants that:

- They aren't on a television talk show. The purpose isn't to approve or disapprove of the actions of the people in the film, but to learn from their experiences so we can make our own families and communities better.
- Issues that come up for Idris, Seun and their families aren't more important than other issues (e.g., the challenges faced by girls or by people of other races)—they are simply the obstacles that arose from the experiences of these families. This event is going to focus on what we can learn from those particular experiences. We'll save the other topics for another time.
- Joking can be a fun way to interact with friends, but since we don't have that relationship with everyone in the room, and since insults, even in jest, can be easily misunderstood, that type of joking is best reserved for other venues.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach)

Controversial topics often make for excellent discussions. But by their very nature, those same topics can also give rise to deep emotions and the expression of strongly held beliefs. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere in which people feel safe, encouraged and respected, making it more likely that they will be willing to share their ideas openly and honestly. Here's how:

### Preparing Yourself:

- **Identify your own hot-button issues.**  
View the film before the event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.
- **Be knowledgeable.**  
You don't need to be an expert on the issues, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact. Review the Background Information section in this guide. You may also want to take an advance look at the websites and articles suggested in the Resources section.
- **Be clear about your role.**  
You may find yourself taking on several roles for a single event, including host, organizer—even projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion. Keep in mind that being a facilitator is not the same as being a teacher. A teacher's job is to convey specific information. In contrast, a facilitator remains neutral, helping to move the discussion along without imposing his or her views on the dialogue.
- **Know your group.**  
Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to the issue or have the members of the group dealt with it before? Factors like geography, age, race, religion and socioeconomic class all can have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point-of-view.

### Preparing the Group:

- **Consider how well group members know one another.**  
If you are bringing together people who have never met, you may want to devote some time to introductions at the beginning of the event.
- **Agree to ground rules regarding language.**  
Involve the group in establishing some basic rules to ensure respect and to aid clarity. Typically,

such rules include prohibiting yelling and the use of slurs, as well as asking participants to speak in the first person ("I think . . .") rather than generalizing for others ("Everyone knows that . . .").

- **Try to give everyone an opportunity to be heard.**  
Be clear about how people will take turns or indicate that they want to speak. Plan a strategy for preventing one or two people from dominating the discussion.
- **Talk about the difference between dialogue and debate.**  
In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively. Remind people that they are engaged in a dialogue. This will be especially important in preventing a discussion from dissolving into a repetitive, rhetorical, political or religious debate.
- **Encourage active listening.**  
Ask the group to think of the event as being about listening as well as discussing. Participants can be encouraged to listen for things that challenge as well as reinforce their own ideas. You may also consider asking people to practice formal "active listening," in which participants listen without interrupting the speaker, and then rephrase what was said to make sure they have heard it correctly.
- **Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of his or her own experience.**  
Who we are influences how we interpret what we see. Everyone in the group may have a different view about the content and meaning of the film they have just seen, and each of them may be accurate. It can help people understand one another's perspectives if in addition to sharing their views, speakers identify the evidence on which they base their opinions.
- **Take care of yourself and group members.**  
If the intensity level rises, pause to let everyone take a deep breath. You might also consider providing a safe space for participants to "vent," perhaps with a partner or in a small group of familiar faces. If you anticipate that your topic may upset people, be prepared to refer them to local support agencies or have local professionals present. Think carefully about what you ask people to share publicly, and explain things like confidentiality and whether or not press will be present.



## A Step By Step Guide To Organizing A POV American Promise Screening Event

### BEFORE YOUR EVENT

## Step 1: Determine your objectives.

POV's community engagement screenings can be tailored to your organization's specific goals.

Ask yourself:

#### **Have I defined my goals?**

Set realistic objectives with your partners by thinking about some basic questions: What do you want to happen as a result of your event? Who is your target audience? Keep in mind that some goals are easier to accomplish than others. For example, adding to a person's knowledge base is easier than changing his or her beliefs and behaviors. Being clear about your objectives will make it easier to decide how to structure the event (whether as a single meeting or an ongoing project, for example), target publicity and evaluate results.

#### **Does the way I am planning to structure the event fit my objectives?**

Do you need an outside facilitator, translator or sign language interpreter? If your objective is to share information, are there local experts on the topic who should be present? How large an audience do you want? (Large groups are appropriate for information exchanges, while small groups allow for more intensive dialogue.)

#### **Have I arranged to involve all stakeholders?**

Think about contacting other community organizations, public officials or experts who might be good speakers. If your group is planning to take action that will affect people other than those present, it is especially important to give voice to those not in the room and ensure that people are allowed to speak for themselves. Ask stakeholders to identify their objectives and determine to what extent they can be involved.

### Possible goals include:

- encouraging dialogue around important issues that affect your community
- raising awareness of important world issues
- forming new organizational alliances
- making new contacts with the media and becoming a resource they will continue to consult
- recruiting new members through increased visibility
- enhancing your educational curriculum for students, staff and/or volunteers
- studying the art of documentary

## Step 2: Sign up to host an event.

- **Register** to borrow films from us at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach/amdoc/events/register.php>
- **Get approved** and complete your user profile.
- **Activate your account** and "create an event" via our online application.

\*As POV adheres to PBS guidelines, please note that objectives may not include a specific call to action around legislation unless both sides are represented.



## Step 3: Handle Logistics

Decide on a date, time and location.

\*Start planning your event at least one month in advance of the scheduled screening to ensure timely delivery of the film and other appropriate materials. If you do not receive the film you requested *one week* prior to your event, notify us at [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org).

Your location should

- be reserved for the duration of the film, if not longer
- be large enough to accommodate all attendees
- have proper A/V equipment

Let us know if you change any of your plans by contacting us at [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org)

## Step 4: Preview the Film.

### Tips:

**We *strongly* advise you to watch the film on the equipment you will be using on the day of your event.**

**If you have any problems with the copy of the film you are sent, email us at [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org) and we will work with you to resolve the issue.**

### Ask Yourself:

**If the group is large, are there plans to break into smaller groups? Or should attendance be limited?**

**Is the event being held in a space where all participants will feel comfortable?**

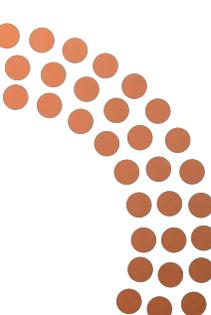
Is the space wheelchair accessible? Is it in a part of town that's easy to reach by various kinds of transportation? If you are bringing together different constituencies, is the space in neutral territory? Does the physical configuration allow for the kind of discussion you hope to have?

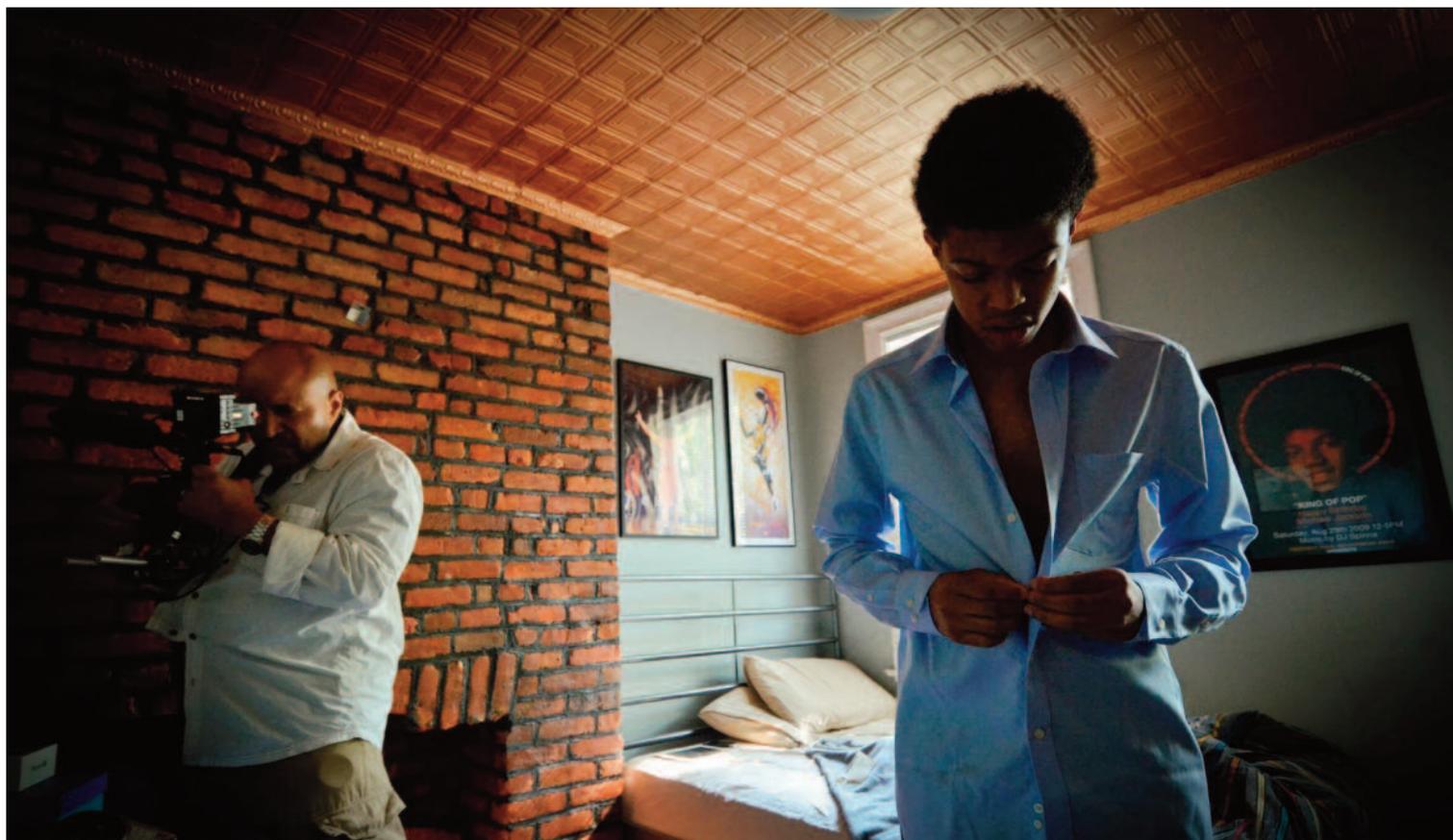
**Will the way that the room is set up help you meet your goals?**

Is the room comfortable? Will everyone be able to see the screen easily and hear the film? If you intend to have a discussion, will people be able to see one another? Are there spaces appropriate for small breakout groups?

**Have I scheduled time to plan for action?**

Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even if the discussion has been difficult. Action steps are especially important for people who already have a good deal of experience talking about the issues on the table. For those who are new to the issues, just engaging in public discussion serves as an action step.





Idris Brewster.

Photo courtesy of Conrad Louis-Charles

## Step 5: Choose a Facilitator and/or Speakers.

- If you are bringing together different segments of your community, *we strongly recommend using an experienced facilitator.*
- If you need to find someone else to facilitate, some university professors, human resource professionals, clergy and youth leaders may be specially trained in facilitation. In addition to these local resources, groups such as the National Conference for Community and Justice and the National Association for Community Mediation may be able to provide or help you locate skilled facilitators.
- It is best to choose people who are familiar with the issues and can create a friendly environment for open discussion and generate meaningful dialogue about the issues raised by the film.

### Tips:

To help your facilitators or moderators, we have free downloadable discussion guides available in our partner toolkits for all of our films at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

Email or send your facilitators the [Tips for Facilitators \(page 9\)](#).



Idris Brewster.

Photo courtesy of Andrew Ellis

## Step 6: Do Media Outreach.

- **Send us a completed Media Contact list** (at the end of the guide) and your press release as soon as you have established your press contacts.
  - Our Communications Department must approve your contacts to ensure there is no overlap between our outreach efforts and yours.

Please note that all materials must include the **POV logo** ([www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom)) and the phrase “This event is a collaboration with POV, the award-winning independent nonfiction film series on PBS. ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))”

- **Prepare press kits for distribution** on the night of your event.
  - Mail press kits to media contacts who cannot attend.

### Each kit should include:

- a press release (you can adapt the **POV** version available in our online Pressroom: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom/>)
- a flyer adapted to your event (you can contact us at [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org) for a template)
- general information about your organization

### • Ask reporters to attend your event or review the film.

- Pitch the value of this unique screening and the importance of encouraging dialogue around contemporary social issues.
- If reporters cannot attend and would like to obtain a copy of the program for review, they should contact POV’s Communications Department at (212) 989-7425 x324.
- If local broadcast information (day and time) is available, encourage reporters to include it in their stories so others can tune into the program.



## DURING YOUR EVENT

### Step 7: Handle Certain Tasks on the Day of the Event.

- Confirm facilities.
- Make sure all A/V equipment is working properly.
- Go over discussion points with your facilitator.
- Take pictures during your event—send us copies if you like!
- If you are expecting a large audience, plan to break participants into groups for discussion following the screening of the film.

#### Tips:

Pass around a sign-up sheet at the beginning.

Pass out Audience Evaluation forms at the end.

Reserve the last half hour of your meeting to strategize about follow-up activities.

Announce the local broadcast date (if applicable) and pass around flyers encouraging audience responses to the film and ensuring that audience members know how to purchase the film.

Inform audience members that they can continue the dialogue after the event by posting comments on the POV blog at [www.pbs.org/pov/blog](http://www.pbs.org/pov/blog) or sending email to [pbs@pov.org](mailto:pbs@pov.org).

## AFTER YOUR EVENT

### Step 8: Wrap Up.

- Mail the film and completed audience evaluations to:  
**POV, Attn: Community Engagement, 20 Jay St., Suite 940,  
Brooklyn, NY 11201.**
- Log back into the Community Network and fill out your event coordinator evaluation (click on Edit Evaluation) at [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach/amdoc/events/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach/amdoc/events/).

Collecting feedback is a great way to measure the impact of your event. It can be helpful to have concrete data when you are looking for funding for future programs. Feel free to use the data collected in the POV audience evaluations for your own purposes

## Selected People Featured in **American Promise**

### The Boys



**Idris Brewster** was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. In 2012 he graduated from the Dalton School and began his freshman year at Occidental College in Los Angeles. He is an avid skateboarder and enjoys a game of basketball every now and then.



**Oluwaseun (Seun) Summers** was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, the eldest son of Tony and Stacey Summers. He graduated from Benjamin Banneker Academy in 2012 and began his freshman year at the State University of New York at Fredonia. He is a black belt in karate and enjoys drawing.

## Selected People Featured in **American Promise**

### The Parents



**Michèle Stephenson**, Idris's mother, is a graduate of McGill University and Columbia Law School. Her Panamanian and Haitian heritage has fueled her passion for human rights and telling stories about communities of color. Her work has appeared on PBS, Showtime, MTV and other outlets. Stephenson's honors include the Silverdocs Diversity Award and the Henry Hampton Award for Excellence in Film and Digital Media.



**Joe Brewster**, Idris's father, is a Harvard- and Stanford-educated psychiatrist who specializes in organizational analysis, the use of psychoanalytical principals to understand and improve organizations. In 1992, Brewster sold his first screenplay to the Jackson/McHenry group under the Warner Bros. imprint. In 1996, he wrote and directed *The Keeper*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and garnered numerous national and international awards, including an Independent Spirit Award nomination.



**Stacey O. Summers**, Seun's mother, is a graduate of Binghamton University. A nurse care manager for Elder Care Health, a managed long-term care agency based in New York City, Summers has dedicated most of her nursing career to providing support and care to the homebound elderly. The mother of four boys, she was born in Trinidad and raised in Brooklyn, New York.



**Anthony (Tony) Summers**, Seun's father, is a graduate of Binghamton University. He works as a systems engineer for CBS and is a father of four. Prior to joining CBS, he worked in computer engineering around the globe in the service of a variety of corporations. He was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York.



Seun Summers.

Photo courtesy of Alfredo Alcantara

## The Black Male Achievement Gap

Children in the United States are said to live in the land of opportunity and are told anything is possible. In the United States, parents of different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds share many of the same aspirations for their children, but there are invisible barriers that keep some children from progressing at the same rate as their peers. This is particularly true for African-American boys, who are twice as likely as white boys to be held back in elementary school, three times as likely to be suspended from school and half as likely to graduate from college—a phenomenon known as the black male achievement gap.

Black males, even when given the same educational and economic resources as their peers of other races, are likely to fall short of their counterparts in virtually every measure of academic success. It is perhaps the single most pressing problem black males face today. In order to remain competitive in the global marketplace and create a space of participation and collaboration where people of all races work together to address pervasive inequalities in American society in a collective, non-accusatory way, the American education system must be revamped.

### Statistics: Black males are . . .

**. . . more likely to attend schools that are under-resourced and performing poorly.**

Currently, only 15% of black students attend schools that are well-resourced and high performing, while 42% attend schools that are both under-resourced and performing poorly.<sup>1</sup> In high poverty and minority schools, students are 70% more likely to have a non-certified teacher in a specific subject, and only 40% of such schools offer physics courses and 29% offer calculus.<sup>2</sup>

**. . . less likely to obtain college degrees.**

Only 16% of black males hold college degrees, compared to 32% of white males.<sup>3</sup>

**. . . three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their white peers, therefore missing valuable learning time.**

Black students, most often males, are punished with out-of-school suspension nearly three times more often than white students.<sup>4</sup>



Idris Brewster, Miles Brewster, Joe Brewster.

Photo courtesy of Michèle Stephenson

**... 2.5 times less likely to be enrolled in gifted and talented programs, even if their prior achievements reflect the ability to succeed.**

Only 3% of black male students are enrolled in gifted and talented programs.<sup>5</sup>

**... 2.5 times more likely to be classified as mentally challenged by their schools.**

3% of black male students are classified in this manner, as compared to only 1.4% of white male students. Black male students make up 20% of all students in the United States classified as mentally retarded, although mentally retarded students are only 9% of the student population as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

**... more likely to have under-prepared and ineffective teachers.**

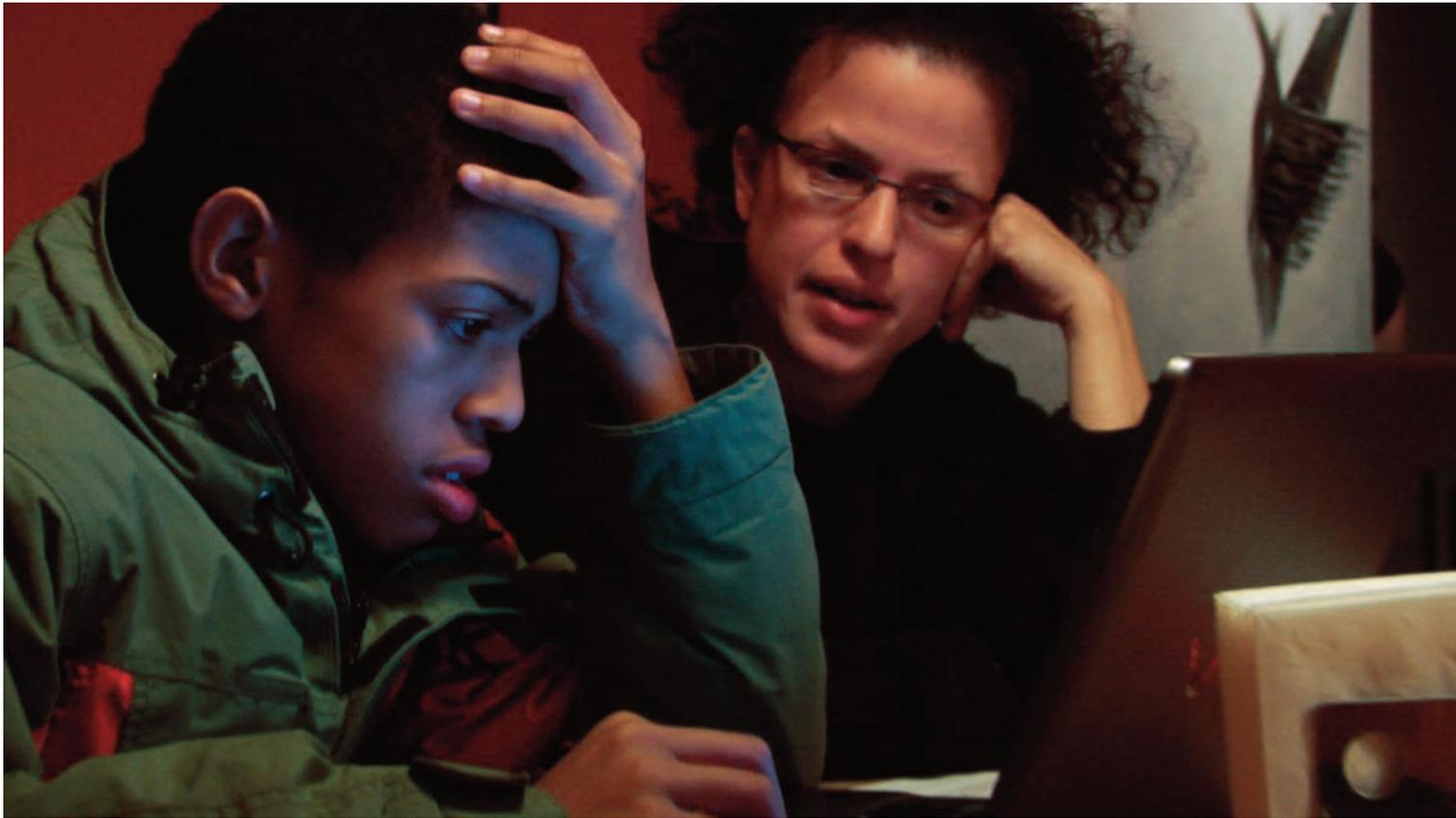
Research of minority-dominant schools shows that 28% of their core academic teachers lack appropriate certification.<sup>7</sup>

**... less likely to graduate from high school in four years than their white peers.**

Only 52% of black males who entered high school in 2006 graduated in four years, compared with 78% of white non-Latino males and 58% of Latino males.<sup>8</sup>

**... twice as likely to drop out of high school as their white peers.**

In 2009, 4.8% of black students dropped out of grades 10 through 12, compared to 2.4% of white students.<sup>9</sup>



Idris Brewster and Michèle Stephenson.

Photo courtesy of Jon Stuyvesant

### What Researchers Are Saying

*“If black male students were suspended and expelled at the same rates as white male students, half a million fewer out-of-school suspensions and at least 10,000 fewer expulsions would occur.”*

**- Schott Foundation for Public Education**

*“The problem with black male achievement is institutionalized, and the solution will demand deliberate systematic strategies that involve full cooperation between concerned citizens, parents, activists, teachers, school leaders and policymakers.”*

**- Ivory A. Toldson, Howard University**

*“Philanthropic investments in strategies to address the myriad challenges confronting black males will help in turn ‘to lift all boats’ for underserved, vulnerable and marginalized people and will ensure a brighter, stronger and more equal and open society for us all.”*

**- Open Society Foundations**

## The High School Drop-Out Crisis

Despite significant progress over the past decade, graduation rates for African-American and Hispanic students remain very low in many states and significant gaps persist. In an era of limited opportunities for those without high school diplomas to find jobs, one third of African-American students and 30 percent of Hispanic students are still not graduating high school.<sup>10</sup>

Examining why graduation rates for African-American and Hispanic students remain very low requires an in-depth look at the in-school experiences of these students and the messages they receive about school and achievement off school grounds.

In school:

- One in four African Americans and nearly one in five Hispanic students still attend high schools where graduating is not the norm. These “dropout factories” project a culture that frames dropping out as acceptable and common, something to give in to rather than fight.<sup>11</sup> Authority figures in schools, from superintendents to teachers, who put forth low expectations for their students only encourage students to be satisfied with that low level of achievement.<sup>12</sup>
- Fear of failure results in lack of trying. Students would rather it seem to their peers and parents that they are not trying and don’t care, rather than be seen as trying and still struggling.<sup>13</sup> Nearly half of the students interviewed for a report titled “The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts” said that a major reason for dropping out was a lack of engagement.<sup>14</sup>

Ronald Ferguson of Harvard’s Achievement Gap Initiative and his peers find differences in the lives of students outside of school have impact on their attitudes about achievement:

- Images of successful African-American and Hispanic adults are not as accessible as images of successful white adults in the United States. Minority students who are not shown successful “future selves” for which to strive are not receiving the same positive reinforcement that white students receive.<sup>15</sup>
- An intergenerational study of African-American and European-American parenting practices, customs, knowledge and priorities found that practices such as

creating a school-oriented home environment, allowing adolescents to make decisions and not burdening school attendees with too many chores had particularly important effects on the achievement gap. Messages students receive from their parents about school achievement through active, encouraging, verbal or non-verbal cues have an effect on achievement.<sup>16</sup>

- Being part of a community that lacks support systems—afterschool programs, neighborhood organizations, other families and informal social networks—that help parents and families succeed in school can impede achievement levels. W. Norton Grubb’s study on inequality finds that resources are often allocated by family background or race: students from high socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to live in districts with high spending and well-credentialed teachers, while poor and minority students are more likely to be found in urban districts with lower levels of spending (especially relative to need), un-credentialed teachers, overwhelmed administrators and incompetent district staff. This pattern in resource inequality extends to the home, where overburdened parents lack a support system that should be provided by the school system.<sup>17</sup>

The 2013 “Building a Grad Nation” report from America’s Promise Alliance states that a significant decrease in “dropout factory” schools shows that the nation is making progress. The organization says that by setting goals and accelerating efforts in states that matter most, the nation can achieve a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020.

Read the full report. [The 2013 Update of Building a Grad Nation](http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx) (<http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx>) provides an analysis of the latest graduation rate data and a comprehensive review of efforts to accelerate student achievement from across the nation. To connect with different perspectives and to learn more about what is happening state to state to achieve a 90 percent graduation rate, visit the American Graduate Research Center (<http://www.americangraduate.org/learn/research-center.html>)

<sup>1</sup> Schott Foundation for Public Education. "National Opportunity to Learn Campaign. Federal Recommendations." [schottfoundation.org/otl/otl-federal-recommendations-final.pdf](http://schottfoundation.org/otl/otl-federal-recommendations-final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Toldson, Ivory A. and Chance W. Lewis. "Challenge the Status Quo."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lewin, Tamar. "Black Students Face More Discipline, Data Suggests." *The New York Times*, March 6, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Black Alliance for Educational Options. "Urgent Need." <http://www.baeo.org/urgentneed.html>

<sup>6</sup> The Future of Children. "Special Education for Students with Disabilities: Analysis and Recommendations." <http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=57&articleid=337&sectionid=2249>

<sup>7</sup> Black Alliance for Educational Options. "Urgent Need." <http://www.baeo.org/urgentneed.html>

<sup>8</sup> Gamboa, Suzanne "High School Graduation Rate for Black Males Trails White Students." *The Huffington Post*, September 19, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Zhao, Emmeline. "High School Dropout Rates for Minority and Poor Students Disproportionately High." *The Huffington Post*, October 20, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> America's Promise Alliance. "Building A Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic." <http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx>

<sup>11</sup> America's Promise Alliance. "Dropout Crisis Facts." <http://www.americaspromise.org/our-work/grad-nation/dropout-facts.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> CNN Pressroom. "'GREAT EXPECTATIONS' Pursues Solutions for Meeting the Achievement Gap in Education." <http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2013/08/29/great-expectations-pursues-solutions-for-meeting-the-achievement-gap-in-education/>

<sup>13</sup> Excellence With Equity: A Social Movement for the 21st Century. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=euzPmOcNjXQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euzPmOcNjXQ)

<sup>14</sup> Bridgeland, John M. et al. Civic Enterprises: "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts." <http://www.ignitelearning.com/pdf/TheSilentEpidemic3-06FINAL.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Excellence With Equity: A Social Movement for the 21st Century. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=euzPmOcNjXQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euzPmOcNjXQ)

<sup>16</sup> Mandara, Jelani, Fatima Varner, Nereira Greene and Scott Richman. "Intergenerational Family Predictors of the Black-White Achievement Gap." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 101, no. 4 (November 2009): 867-78.

<sup>17</sup> Grubb, W. Norton. "Dynamic Inequality I: Using NELS88 To Analyze Schooling Outcomes Over Time," May 2006. [http://gse3.berkeley.edu/faculty/WNGrubb/papers/Grubb\\_Dynamic\\_Inequality.pdf](http://gse3.berkeley.edu/faculty/WNGrubb/papers/Grubb_Dynamic_Inequality.pdf)

**Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:**

- **What did you learn from *American Promise*? What insights did it provide?**
- **If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask? What would you ask him or her?**
- **Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?**
- **What is the significance of the film's title? How does the film define the promise of the title and how does that definition compare with your own definition?**

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Deciding on Dalton

Joe Brewster says of Idris, “Dalton will open doors for him for the rest of his life.” Which doors do schools like Dalton open? What do they offer that other schools don’t?

Given Dalton’s reputation for excellence, why is the decision to send their sons to the school difficult for the parents featured in the film?

Stacey Summers summarizes a major concern when she says, “When we put our children in this environment . . . what perception are they going to have of themselves? Is this going to be something that is going to help them in the future or something that is going to hinder them?” How would you answer her question?

Look at these statements by the boys’ mothers:

Michèle Stephenson explains, “Initially, I didn’t even want to go to the interview at Dalton. I didn’t want Idris to be part of this elite school that didn’t give him any sense of grounding or sense of self . . . You know—a bunch of rich white kids, disconnected from the larger world and self-involved, etc.”

Stacey Summers says, “I want Seun to be comfortable around white folks because I think, even at this point, I’m not comfortable around white folks.”

What is your reaction to their concerns? What insights do these comments offer about white privilege and its impact on black families?

Banneker principal Daryl Rock says that his school’s goal is to be a “nurturing place. We want kids to be successful, do some challenging work. But make them feel good

about themselves and not always worry about how they are going to fit in or how people are going to look at them.” How does this goal differentiate Banneker’s school climate from Dalton’s? Which school would you choose and why?

Stacey and Tony Summers agree that they “have no problem with public school—if you can find a good public school in your district.” Even Banneker, one of the best schools in Brooklyn, graduates students with an average SAT score of 1430 compared with the average of 2200 for Dalton students. Why are so many parents currently forced to look at private schools to find high quality education for their children? Why have most of those private schools remained predominantly white, while urban public schools primarily serve children of color?

### Just a Part of Childhood?

At age nine, Idris is suspended from school because, according to him, “They think I hit Sam . . . but I didn’t . . . and then I got another day’s suspension because they think I’m lying.” Do you see a link between this event and the story that Tony recalls about false accusations: “When something would go wrong, there seems like there was a lineup of all the black kids . . . first to question and the white kids were the last. They didn’t even get to them until after they questioned the black kids first. But that was how many years ago and times changed. I hope times changed.” Do you think times have changed? Why or why not?

Seven-year-old Idris declares that he wants to be a professional basketball player when he grows up. As a high

**Oluwaseun Summers.**

Photo courtesy of Conrad Louis-Charles

schooler he says, “Basketball is the only other thing I’m good at.” Why is basketball so important to Idris? What is the relationship between basketball and masculinity? How about between basketball and black identity?

Idris reports enjoying his friends’ bar mitzvah parties, but also reports that when he asks girls to dance, “They usually say no. I don’t know why. They just say no, which makes me feel bad.” He speculates, “Bet if I was white I would be better off. Isn’t that true?” How does dating change friendships between black and white classmates? What could a school or parents do to help children navigate those tricky adolescent waters?

Idris reports that sometimes when he plays basketball in the community he gets mocked for talking “like a white boy,” so he changes to slang and consciously chooses not to talk “like I talk at Dalton.” Of all the things that kids

could tease each other about, why does this one seem to have such staying power? In what ways does language bind us to our culture?

Idris and his mother make phone calls for the Obama presidential campaign. What difference does the idea of a black president make for boys like Seun and Idris? How is the meaning of this event in the boys’ lives different from the meaning it carries for their parents?

Seun studies martial arts, and we see him earn his purple belt. What are the benefits of this type of activity? What other activities offer similar benefits? Who, in your community, has access to those activities? How might all children be provided with access?



Summers Family.

Photo courtesy of Orrie King

## Parenting

What did you learn from the film about parenting black boys in the United States?

How do the various parenting styles exhibited by Tony Summers, Stacey Summers, Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson compare to the styles in your own family?

Stacey Summers shares this story about her young son Seun:

“About a month ago he was brushing his teeth like to bleed and I said, ‘Seun, what are you doing?’ He was trying to brush the color out of his gums so that he can have pink gums. And I said, ‘Why you trying to do that, what’s wrong with the color of your gums?’ [He replied,] ‘They’re black . . . They’re brown . . . They’re ugly and . . .’ Where’s he getting these things from? I don’t know. I mean, obviously, the

white people have pink gums . . . Every child wants to be like the other child; nobody wants to be different.”

Have you ever experienced a child expressing what you suspected might be internalized racism? What happened? What did you do? How might you have responded to Seun had you been there?

The parent of one boy tells a story about another student who assumed that her son’s dislike of a particular saxophone piece was “because all you like is hip-hop.” The son reported trying to compose himself and not to react angrily—even though he felt angry—because that’s what his parents had advised him to do. How often do the children in your life encounter racism, and what *do* you teach them about how to respond?

One of the Dalton parents says, “As parents of a black male, we know the struggle that they are going to have to face, the reality of the way that people look at them and fear them when they see them, because every day you’re inundated with this marketing that a dark black face is dangerous.” In what ways does such racism pose challenges for parents of black boys that are different from the challenges faced by parents of black girls? How about for parents of white boys?

Michèle Stephenson recognizes that her husband has a special affinity for sports, noting that he doesn’t “put the same energy into other stuff.” How would you describe the role of sports in Joe Brewster’s and Tony Summers’s lives? How does their own fondness for athletics affect their relationships with, and expectations for, their sons?

Differences in parenting styles appear in the ways parents prompt their boys to do better. In a typical example, Joe Brewster criticizes Idris’s poor performance on the basketball court as lazy. In contrast, Michèle Stephenson tries to comfort Idris, who is upset about the game. What do they each see that leads them to different approaches? What role does gender play in their differing responses? How do each of their actions reflect their visions about what it takes to be a man?

When Idris is rejected from his father’s alma mater, Stanford, Brewster tells his son, “You are a brilliant young man but you’re lazy” Later he says, “We’re disappointed, but we’re not disappointed in you. We are very happy with your progress. You came a very long way . . . You had a learning disability that we did not even address until the tenth grade . . . There’s nothing you can’t do in this world. We’ll back you up all the way.” In a similar vein, Tony Summers says to Seun at the memorial for his brother, “I’m hard because I want you to be a better man than I am, and in order for you to be that better man, you have to work, because anything worth having is worth working for.” What are the key messages that Brewster and Summers are trying to convey to their sons? Why are those messages important? How are they similar to or different from messages that you received from your parents and/or that you have conveyed to your children?

### Parents as Educators and Advocates

According to Dalton, Idris has “great difficulty with impulse control, both physically and verbally. He talks out of turn continually, has trouble respecting other students’ physical boundaries.” Years later, Idris receives an official

diagnosis of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Why might his parents have been resistant to an ADHD diagnosis when Idris was young? How do clinical diagnoses prevent examination of other systems at play, including racism?

When Idris is offered tutoring in fifth grade, his mother expresses some skepticism, saying, “I don’t want the tutoring to be at the expense of him being perceived a certain way that is totally inaccurate. I think that there is a perception that these are young black boys who need extra help because they are not used to this kind of exposure.” How would you determine the appropriateness of the school’s actions? What clues would you use? If you were a Dalton parent, how could you productively engage the school in conversation about this issue?

When Idris is young, Stephenson has him give M-word examples in a letter of the day activity. He offers several answers, including “macaroni and cheese” and “Mozart.” What is the relationship between vocabulary development and academic success? What is the relationship between socioeconomic class, culture and vocabulary development? In addition to Stephenson’s game, how can parents surround their children with rich vocabulary experiences?

In response to Idris’s struggles in school, his parents spend more time with him focusing on homework. Joe Brewster even devises a spreadsheet to track time spent on various activities. When accused of being too controlling, he says that they weren’t controlling enough, allowing “too much of the PlayStation; too much television.” What do you think? What strategies do you use (or would you recommend) to ensure that homework is completed and turned in on time?

What messages do Idris’s and Seun’s parents convey to their kids about going to college? How do they convey those messages? What do they do? What do they say? How do their messages compare to the messages about college that have been passed down in your family?

How would you define success for children in your community? What are the sources of your ideas about success and how do they compare to the visions of success expressed in the film? In your view, what is the number one thing parents should be doing to help their boys succeed? What could boys be doing to help themselves?

**Seun Summers.**

Photo courtesy of Errol Webber

## School Experiences

Joe Brewster describes a report from Dalton indicating that “our son is a hard to manage guy.” This contrasts with the soft-spoken, eager kid that his parents know. Brewster says, “They decided that our son is a problem. He’s not a problem at home. He’s not a problem in the community. He’s a problem at Dalton. The question is, what is it about Idris that makes him disruptive?” Idris’s mother adds, “Well, not so much about him, but what is it about the environment?” How would you answer that question? Why might Idris be seen as “hard to manage” at school but not anywhere else?

Dalton’s assistant curriculum director, Martha Edelson, attributes some of Idris’s and Seun’s difficulties to lack of organization and time management skills, saying, “We do expect a lot of independence.” How might that expectation be based on the experiences of Dalton’s traditionally wealthy families (many of which hire teams of adults—private tutors, nannies, drivers, personal assistants and others—to help children stay on track)? Why might the school think that students of color possess weaker organizational skills than their white peers? What types of experiences

outside of school help children develop independence and time management skills?

In describing how well he fits in at Banneker, Seun says, “You feel some type of comfort when you’re with people of the same race so you don’t have to feel like the odd one out.” What do children get from being around people who look like them or who share their culture that they don’t get from being in mixed groups?

What do you think Seun and his classmates got out of their Africa Tours Club experience? What might change for Dalton’s students if the school offered something similar? How do the benefits of school trips with classmates differ from the benefits of individual travel with one’s family?

One of Seun’s classmates adopts “product of the diaspora” as a central part of her identity. What does that phrase mean and why do you think she finds it compelling enough to encourage her friends to join her in identifying this way?

How does Stacey Summers's cancer diagnosis and treatment affect Seun and the rest of his family? How about the death of his younger brother, Jabulani? What does his education contribute to his ability to deal with these situations? How do the attitudes and actions of Banneker's staff (especially Seun's advisor, Debbie Almontaser) help Seun cope?

Do you expect that Idris and Seun will enjoy college? Why or why not? When it comes to higher education, what do young people need in order to graduate? How can we ensure that more boys of color succeed in school and graduate prepared for college?

### Creating Supportive Schools

What are the film's major lessons for teachers and school administrators interested in helping black boys succeed in school (and beyond)?

Dalton's mission statement says, in part, that the school is "an intentionally diverse community." In the film, admissions director Elisabeth "Babby" Krentz adds that in the school's vision, diversity "is . . . a long term process." What do you think is—or should be—involved in that process? How does a commitment to diversity translate into action?

Banneker principal Daryl Rock questions the need for diversity, saying, "I'm not against kids being in diverse environments, but at this point . . . it's not really necessary. White people . . . never say, 'I want to take my kid out of an all white school and put them in an all black school so things would be more diverse.' We can teach our kids." Do you agree with Rock? Why or why not?

Dalton middle school director Libby Hixson says, "We don't have the same problem usually with African-American girls . . . There is a cultural disconnect between independent schools and African-American boys, and we see a high rate of kids not being successful . . . And the question is why . . . Where's the disconnect? What's going wrong? What are we doing as a school that is not supporting these guys?" What could the school do to find answers to Hixson's questions? How would you answer those questions? Why do you suppose girls have a different experience in the school than boys do?

Dalton's founder, Helen Parkhurst, established the school's foundational philosophy that "education should teach you to be a passionate, lifelong learner." How does a school instill passion for lifelong learning? From what you see in the film, which of Dalton's strategies work to fulfill their founder's vision and which fall short, espe-

cially for Seun and Idris?

The principal at Benjamin Banneker Academy tells his students, "The people who are the doctors, the lawyers, they are not necessarily the smartest people. They're the people who work the hardest." Why would a principal choose to minimize innate intelligence and emphasize hard work?

Dalton admissions director Krentz says, "What we teach at Dalton is to teach [students] that they have a voice, and they are going to grow." What actions does Dalton take to lead the school's students to grow up expecting that people will listen to them?

A Banneker teacher explains that they prefer the phrase "enslaved Africans" to "slaves" because the latter obscures the violent reality of the kidnapping and forced labor on which the slave economy was built. What difference does the framing of issues like slavery make in terms of supporting African-American boys?

Tony Summers recalls being the only black child in his class, saying, "It wasn't a pleasant thing back then . . . One of the things that I always remember was being in history class. I probably was about eight and they talked about Harriet Tubman and how she helped slaves escape, and all the little white kids would turn around and look at me, like she helped me escape from slavery." Have you experienced or witnessed a similar situation? What was it like for you?

Dalton middle school director Hixson acknowledges that "numbers are important" and the school recognizes that it would be creating a burden if it had so few students of color that these students would be the "sole representative of something." In the years that Idris and Seun attended, the school had about 25 percent students of color (including African-American, Caribbean, Latino and Asian students). In your view, is that percentage high enough to ease the burden? If not, what percentage would be adequate?

Initially, Seun says, "I love being at Dalton." By sixth grade, he hates school, and by eighth grade he is in danger of failing. The parent of another black boy says that his son entered Dalton as an excellent math student but adds, "I'm watching him going down and I am questioning what is happening." Brewster observes that Idris "is starting to see himself as a weak student. His self-esteem has fallen through the floor." What do you think is happening at Dalton that is undermining the confidence of some students, contrary to the school's stated goals? What could the families and staff at Dalton do to prevent the downward slide that the parents of these boys observe?



Brewster Family.

Photo courtesy of Orrie King

## Media Literacy

On being filmed, Idris says, “I don’t really think much of it, to be honest. I live my life and sometimes there is a camera around me. It’s been around me since I was five years old.” What do you learn from the film about the impact of cameras on our lives? Would you agree to have your life—or your child’s life—filmed? Why or why not?

What challenges do Stephenson and Brewster face as parents of one of their film’s subjects, as subjects themselves and also as filmmakers? How do they deal with those challenges?

Which, if any, parts of your childhood were recorded in photographs, on video or on film? How do the events that your family preserved compare with the events documented in the film? How are your memories shaped by what was recorded? Which events do you choose to

record now? Why are those events important for you to document and preserve?

**Additional media literacy questions are available at:**  
[www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php)



## Taking Action

*American Promise* is more than a film. We hope to help fuel a campaign that mobilizes families, educators, young people and advocates to take part in conversations and actions revolving around how we can better serve black boys, ensuring that all young people are equipped with the same opportunities for excellence. This section provides four types of audience members with tangible actions they can take to help make a difference. Facilitators, please print out the next few pages and hand them out to your audience members.

### PARENTS

Create a Promise Club support group organized around the 10 chapters of the filmmakers' parenting book. The focus of these groups is to support the academic success and socio-emotional well being of participants' sons over the course of a yearlong program. The Promise Club will give parents and caregivers the tools and guidance to create structured and small (two to 15 people), local support groups to help their children succeed. The purpose is to provide parents with a structure in which they can help their sons pursue the highest quality education possible through encouragement, information sharing, positive motivation, critical evaluation and advocacy. More information is available at [AmericanPromise.org](http://AmericanPromise.org).

- Use the *American Promise* mobile app to share parenting tips and/or find other ways for local parents to share tips specific to your community.

### EDUCATORS

- Use this discussion guide and POV's lesson plan resources to explore the themes and issues in *American Promise* with students.
- Visit Teaching Tolerance's professional development guide for educators, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. <http://www.tolerance.org/blog/promises-black-boys-kept-and-broken>

### STUDENTS AND YOUTH GROUPS

- Explore Active Voice's program designed to foster peer-to-peer mentorship and dialogue for young mentors and check out the *American Promise* youth module, both at [AmericanPromise.org](http://AmericanPromise.org).

### GENERAL PUBLIC

- Participate in online conversations about the film. Consider regularly checking discussion threads to gather wisdom from other parents and share what you have learned with your group or in local and community meetings.
- Volunteer to mentor a young person in your community. Join the *American Promise* Big Brothers Big Sisters campaign or a program with a similar organization to determine where the needs are greatest and to receive guidance about how to be a successful mentor.
- Host a screening for local and state education policy makers. Ask them to commit to at least one change or action that would directly benefit black boys.
- Add a card to The Race Card Project, started by NPR journalist Michele Norris. Each participant summarizes his or her feelings in a single sentence composed of six words. Create your own local wall of cards and use them as prompts for further community dialogue. For examples, visit the project website, [theracecard-project.com](http://theracecard-project.com). Messages there include "Stop seeing black boys as predators" (a response to the killing of Trayvon Martin) and "You talk like a white boy."

**Achievement gap:** disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, ability and socioeconomic status.<sup>18</sup>

**Dropout factory:** a high school with an extremely high number of dropouts.<sup>19</sup>

**Implicit bias:** occurs when someone consciously rejects stereotypes and supports anti-discrimination efforts but also holds negative associations in his or her mind unconsciously.<sup>20</sup>

**Opportunity gap:** differences in circumstance that groups face as they start off in the education system. Opportunity gaps are one of the factors in achievement gaps.<sup>21</sup>

**Racial anxiety:** concern and anxiety, whether conscious or unconscious, experienced around people of a different race than one's own.<sup>22</sup>

**Stereotype threat:** risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group.<sup>23</sup>

**Zoning:** the practice of changing boundaries that determine student school assignments. Zoning policies and practices can exacerbate socioeconomic segregation, create barriers for high-quality schools and limit low-income school choice.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Kingsbury Center. "Achievement Gaps Impact Learning Study." <http://www.kingsburycenter.org/gallery/achievement-gaps-impact-learning-study?tid=241>

<sup>19</sup> America's Promise Alliance. "Building a Grad Nation Report: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic." <http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/Building-a-Grad-Nation.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Open Society Foundations. "Implicit Bias and Social Justice." <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/implicit-bias-and-social-justice>

<sup>21</sup> The Glossary of Education Reform. "Opportunity Gap" <http://edglossary.org/opportunity-gap/>

<sup>22</sup> Open Society Foundations. "Racial Anxiety and Unconscious Bias: How It Affects Us All." <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/events/racial-anxiety-and-unconscious-bias-how-it-affects-us-all>

<sup>23</sup> ReducingStereotypeThreat.org. "What Is Stereotype Threat?" <http://www.reducingstereotypethreat.org/definition.html>

<sup>24</sup> Mead, Sara. "3 Reasons Education Reformers Should Care About Zoning." *Education Week*, February 22, 2011. [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads\\_policy\\_notebook/2011/02/3\\_reasons\\_education\\_reformers\\_should\\_care\\_about\\_zoning.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads_policy_notebook/2011/02/3_reasons_education_reformers_should_care_about_zoning.html)

## THE AMERICAN PROMISE CAMPAIGN

<http://www.americanpromise.org>

In partnership with trusted organizations around the country, the **American Promise** team is launching a national campaign to mobilize parents, educators and young people to identify ways that Americans can better support black boys' social and emotional needs and encourage people to consider the role they play in advancing success for all children. This endeavor will be supported by a set of strategic tools in 2013 and 2014:

- a companion book published by Random House;
- Promise Clubs: local parent support groups designed to foster advocacy and engagement for parents;
- a mobile app that helps parents set and track goals and development for their children; will regularly provide tips for parents;
- a professional development guide for educators by Teaching Tolerance a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center;
- a program designed to foster peer-to-peer mentorship and dialogue for young mentors developed by Active Voice;
- a special campaign with the Big Brothers Big Sisters' Mentoring Brothers in Action program.

## Companion Book

*Promises Kept: Raising Black Boys to Succeed in School and in Life* by Joe Brewster, Michèle Stephenson and acclaimed author Hilary Beard weaves Brewster and Stephenson's story with the practical and often provocative lessons they learned along the way, from their own experiences as well as from innovative new research. The book, published by Spiegel & Grau, is a compelling story, a groundbreaking practical guide, an urgent call-to-arms and an essential book for parents, caregivers, educators and others concerned about the fate of black boys in America. Spiegel & Grau will support the book with national media outreach and marketing campaigns across multiple platforms. The book is available January 14, 2014 and is designed to coincide with the airing of the PBS documentary.

## JOIN AMERICAN PROMISE ONLINE

[www.AmericanPromise.org](http://www.AmericanPromise.org)

The film's official website includes additional clips and images, an interactive discussion of clips, a discussion of parenting strategies (broken down by age and topic), tools for parents, educators, youth and advocates and opportunities to get involved in creating change. You can also find background information about the film and partner organizations.

**Twitter:** @PromiseFilm

**Facebook.com/AmericanPromise**

## Original Online Content on POV

To further enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The **American Promise** website—[www.pbs.org/pov/americanpromise/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/americanpromise/)—includes an original video series about black male achievement, an excerpt from the book *"Promises Kept: Raising Black Boys to Succeed in School and in Life,"* interviews with the filmmakers, graphics to share on social media, guides for bringing the film into the classroom and community, and more.

## What's Your POV?

Share your thoughts about **American Promise** by posting a comment at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/AmericanPromise>

## From the Film

### **BENJAMIN BANNEKER ACADEMY**

<http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/13/K670>

The school's official website provides general information, news and statistics about academic achievement.

### **THE DALTON SCHOOL**

[www.dalton.org](http://www.dalton.org)

Dalton's official website includes general information on the school's programs and philosophy.

## Education

### **2025 CAMPAIGN FOR BLACK MEN AND BOYS**

<http://2025bmb.org/resources-uncover.php>

This organization focuses on the educational, social, emotional, physical, spiritual, political and economic development and empowerment of African descendant men and boys in the United States and offers educational resources.

### **AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION**

<http://aacte.org>

This group promotes learning through high-quality, evidence-based preparation and continuing education for all school personnel.

### **AMERICAN GRADUATE**

[www.AmericanGraduate.org](http://www.AmericanGraduate.org)

American Promise is part of this Corporation for Public Broadcasting initiative. The website offers descriptions of other project broadcasts, as well as classroom resources, activity ideas and background information on graduation rates in the United States.

### **BLACK ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS**

<http://www.baeo.org>

The mission of the Black Alliance for Educational Options is to increase access to high-quality educational options for black children by actively supporting parental choice policies and programs that empower low-income and working-class black families.

### **COALITION OF SCHOOLS EDUCATING BOYS OF COLOR**

<http://www.coseboc.org>

The mission of this group is to connect, inspire, support and strengthen school leaders dedicated to the social, emotional and academic development of boys and young men of color.

### **CONCERNED BLACK MEN NATIONAL**

<http://www.cbmnational.org>

This organization's tutoring program offers an academically focused program in an afterschool setting that links learning to the school day.

### **FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES**

<http://www.facing.org>

This program works with educators to improve their effectiveness in the classroom, as well as students' academic performance and civic learning.

### ***IN MOTION MAGAZINE: "THE TROUBLE WITH BLACK BOYS: THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES"***

[www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pntroub1.html](http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pntroub1.html)

In this 2002 article, Harvard professor of education Pedro A. Noguera provides a useful overview of the issues as he reviews and critiques competing explanations for the lagging academic performance of black males in the United States.

### **INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DIVERSITY NETWORK**

<http://www.isdnetwork.org>

This is an alliance of independent schools, parents and educators dedicated to promoting and supporting diversity, equity, inclusion and multicultural education.

**NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION:  
“RACE AGAINST TIME: EDUCATING BLACK BOYS”  
[www.nea.org/assets/docs/educatingblackboys11rev.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/educatingblackboys11rev.pdf)**

This 2011 report from the nation’s largest teachers’ union includes statistics, the identification of key trends in disparities (e.g., suspensions, special education labels, graduation rates), recommendations for culturally responsive teaching and examples of success.

**OLIVER SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

**<http://oliverscholars.org>**

The Oliver Scholars Program identifies outstanding New York City students of African and Latino descent and provides academic support to prepare them for leading high schools and colleges.

**PARENT REVOLUTION**

**<http://parentrevolution.org>**

This organization aims to shape public education based on what is good for children by empowering parents to transform under-performing schools through community organizing.

**PERCEPTION.ORG**

**[www.perception.org](http://www.perception.org)**

This online hub is dedicated to shaping authentic perceptions of black men and boys.

**STUDENT AFRICAN AMERICAN BROTHERHOOD**

**<http://www.saabnational.org>**

The Student African American Brotherhood works to increase the number of African-American and Latino men who graduate from college by creating a positive peer community based on a spirit of caring.

**TEACHING TOLERANCE**

**<http://www.tolerance.org>**

Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, examines how teachers can recognize and dismantle policies and practices that favor incarceration over education.

**THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND**

**<https://thurgoodmarshallfund.net>**

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund partners with member-schools to increase access, retention and graduation rates of students, identify and prepare students for leadership and create a pipeline to employers for students and alumni.

**UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND**

**<http://www.uncf.org>**

The United Negro College Fund plays a critical role in enabling more than 60,000 students each year to attend college.

**UNITED WAY**

**<http://www.unitedway.org>**

United Way envisions a world where all individuals and families achieve their human potential through education, income stability and healthy lives.

**YMCA**

**<http://www.ymca.net>**

The YMCA works in various communities to make sure that everyone, regardless of age, income or background, has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive.

## Parenting

### THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP INITIATIVE AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

<http://www.agi.harvard.edu/projects/Parenting.php>

The Achievement Gap Initiative is a university-wide effort initiated by the Harvard Graduate School of Education to focus academic research, public education and innovative outreach activities on eliminating achievement gaps, with an emphasis on doing so through parenting.

### AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE: RESOURCES

<http://www.americaspromise.org/Resources.aspx>

America's Promise Alliance provides a toolkit for parents and other resources.

### BIG BROTHER BIG SISTERS

<http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.9iIL13NGKhK6F/b.5962335/k.BE16/Home.htm>

This well-established mentoring organization helps children realize their potential and provides parents with support to help nurture children and strengthen communities.

### CENTER FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILD CARING

[www.ciccparenting.org/NewsLetters/Parenting\\_African\\_American\\_Children.htm](http://www.ciccparenting.org/NewsLetters/Parenting_African_American_Children.htm)

This organization's website serves as a clearinghouse for information and research related to parenting black children.

### EXCELLENT OPTIONS

<http://www.excellent-options.org>

The mission of Excellent Options is to see that all African-American students graduate from high school in their designated years and are equipped to pursue their options successfully.

### GREAT SCHOOLS

<http://www.greatschools.org>

This organization works to leverage the power of digital media to inspire and support parents to solve education-related problems and access helpful resources online and in their communities.

### MOCHA MOMS

<http://www.mochamoms.org>

Mocha Moms is a support group for mothers of color who have chosen not to work full-time outside of the home.

### NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

<http://www.fatherhood.org>

This group aims to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible and committed fathers.

### NATIONAL PTA

<http://www.pta.org>

The purpose of the PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

### PBS PARENTS

[www.pbs.org/parents/child-development](http://www.pbs.org/parents/child-development)

This website offers practical advice in a year-by-year format from birth to age 8, including developmentally appropriate expectations and how to engage children at various ages.



## Media Contact Form

Before you alert local print, radio and television outlets about your local event, please submit this list. Email your list to [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org) and we will respond within 48 hours. This is to ensure that we do not duplicate promotional efforts.

**TO:** Eliza Licht  
**EMAIL:** [events@pov.org](mailto:events@pov.org)  
**FAX:** (212) 989-8230  
**PHONE:** (212) 989-8121 x 318  
**DATE:**

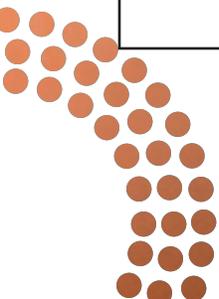
**FROM:**  
**FROM:**  
**ORGANIZATION:**  
**FAX:**  
**PHONE:**

## Event Information:

DATE:  
 TIME:  
 FILM(S):  
 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

## Print, TV, and radio outlets I would like to contact:

Outlet name	Reporter/producer name and title	Phone or email	Pitching strategy/angle



## HOW TO BUY THE FILM

For more information and to contact **American Promise**, visit [www.AmericanPromise.org](http://www.AmericanPromise.org).



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 26th season on PBS in 2013, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 365 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide. POV films have won every major film and broadcasting award, including 32 Emmys, 15 George Foster Peabody Awards, 10 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the Prix Italia. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. Visit [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

### POV Digital [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

### POV Community Engagement and Education

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 600 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

POV has the honor of receiving a 2013 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the desJardins/Blachman Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV's Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Special support provided by The Fledgling Fund and the Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

### American Documentary, Inc. [www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying, and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream-media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic-engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online, and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

### You can follow us on Twitter @POVengage

for the latest news from  
POV Community Engagement & Education.



Front cover: Idris and Seun.  
Photo courtesy of Michèle Stephenson

### American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen



**American Promise** is a co-production of Rada Film Group, ITVS and POV's Diverse Voices Project, with funding provided by the

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